

“The marine world may be degrading faster than our terrestrial one as pollutants pour into it from the land and sky, and stocks of many species decline from overfishing.”

National Park System Advisory Board, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, 2001

Marine and Coastal Resource Preservation

NPS PHOTO BY DAN RICHARDS



As a result of fishing, reefs dominated by purple sea urchins, brittle stars, and sea cucumbers have replaced 80% of the kelp forests in Channel Islands National Park since the park was established in 1980. Twenty-four years of marine monitoring revealed these and other alarming changes in ecosystem health and helped secure the designation of 10 marine reserves in or near the park in 2002.

Although they cover approximately 70% of the planet, oceans are one of the least studied environments on Earth. For centuries, the relative inaccessibility of the seas has contributed to our ignorance of their vast resources. But science is progressively illuminating what was once unknowable and hard to imagine—that the oceans are fragile and must be conserved if they are to thrive and continue to sustain, enlighten, and inspire us. Knowledge is vital in the conservation efforts now unfolding to preserve marine ecosystems, and the National Park Service has a leading role to play in them. In 1998 an executive order, followed by urging of the National Park System Advisory Board, boosted efforts to study and protect coral reefs and marine life in the national parks. As a result, coral reef parks are collaborating more and are either beginning to monitor reefs or refining their monitoring protocols. Partners continue to pioneer ways to gather management information through logistically difficult studies. Especially promising is the designation of fully protected marine reserves in Channel Islands and Dry Tortugas National Parks over the past two years, which are expected to help replenish sea life far beyond the boundaries of these national parks. Several of these themes are explored in the following articles about marine and coastal resource protection in 2002.